NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
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LARRY LESUEUR

CHANGING CONGRESS

ANNCR:

THE TWO-PARTY POLITICAL BALANCE IN CONGRESS WAS NOT MATERIALLY CHANGED BY THE RECENT U.S. ELECTIONS. BUT OTHER FACTORS MAY FORESHADOW CHANGES IN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE. LARRY LESUEUR HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

JUDGING BY THE PARTY RATIOS BETWEEN DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS RESULTING FROM THE RECENT ELECTIONS, THE BALANCE OF POLITICAL POWER IS AS LOP-SIDED AS EVER IN FAVOR OF THE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY. BUT THE COMPARATIVE YOUTHFULNESS AND INEXPERIENCE OF THE NEW CONGRESS, ESPECIALLY THE SENATE, COULD MAKE A CONSIDERABLE DIFFERENCE. THE HUNDRED-MEMBER SENATE WILL HAVE TWENTY NEWCOMERS AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE WILL HAVE AT LEAST SEVENTY NEW FACES.

IN THE HOUSE, THEORETICALLY, ALL 435 SEATS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE EVERY TWO YEARS, ALTHOUGH MOST INCUMBENTS ARE RE-ELECTED. THE SENATE IS A CONTINUOUS BODY AND ONLY ONE-THIRD OF ITS MEMBERSHIP COMES UP FOR ELECTION EVERY SECOND YEAR.

BUT SINCE 1974, THERE HAS BEEN A TURNOVER OF ALMOST HALF THE SENATE. SO WHEN CONGRESS CONVENES IN MID-JANUARY, NEARLY HALF OF ITS MEMBERS WILL HAVE SERVED FOUR YEARS OR LESS. AND IN THE HOUSE, HALF OF ITS MEMBERSHIP WILL HAVE ARRIVED IN WASHINGTON SINCE 1974 OR LATER. THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE SENATORS ELECTED THIS YEAR IS 43 AND THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE HOUSE MEMBERS IS 40. THAT'S A FAR CRY FROM THE PAST, WHEN SOME STATES, PARTICULARLY IN THE SOUTH, ELECTED ITS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FOR TERM-AFTER-TERM, THUS GIVING THEM THE SENIORITY WHICH MEANT IMPORTANT COMMITTEE CHAIRMANSHIPS.

BEFORE THE NATIONAL ELECTION THIS YEAR, AN UNPRECEDENTED NUMBER OF COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN RETIRED FOR REASONS OF AGE. THE RESULT WAS THE PASSING FROM CONGRESS OF MANY WORLD WAR TWO VETERANS, THE GENERATION WHICH HAS VIRTUALLY RUN AMERICA.

THE NEW GENERATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN CONGRESS WERE CHILDREN DURING THE GLOBAL WAR. THEY ONLY READ ABOUT SUCH EVENTS AS THE 1945 FOUNDING OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE 1948 ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL IN THEIR HISTORY BOOKS. MOREOVER, ONLY A HANDFUL OF THE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS NOW SERVING WENT THROUGH THE GREAT DEPRESSION OF THE NINETEEN THIRTIES -- AN EXPERIENCE WHICH HAS SHAPED AMERICAN ECONOMIC LIFE EVER SINCE. THE NEWER GENERATION IN CONGRESS MAY NOW EVEN FIND THAT IT HAS MORE IN COMMON WITH THE MEMBERS OF ITS OWN AGE GROUP THAN WITH THE OLDER CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP. ALSO, THERE ARE NO FEWER THAN EIGHTEEN MEMBERS OF THE SENATE WHO ARE FORMER GOVERNORS OF THEIR STATES -- A CATEGORY WHICH HAS IN THE PAST OFTEN PROVIDED A STEPPING STONE TO A PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, AND SOME OF THESE SENATORS MAY NOW WISH TO ASSERT THEIR LEADERSHIP BECAUSE OF THEIR BROAD EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCE.

IT'S POSSIBLE THAT THE FIRST INDICATIONS OF CHANGE IN CONRESSIONAL ATTITUDES COULD COME AS EARLY AS JANUARY WHEN BOTH HOUSES MEET TO SELECT COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ELECT THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP.

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